

Have you ever considered how much our lives depend on using natural oil and gas? Two authors of books on the South Carolina Junior Book Award, Nominees list this year explore this problem. They use the scarcity of fossil fuel as the background to their stories. In Leslie Connor's *Crunch*, the United States is experiencing not just shortages of gasoline, but no supply at all. Mom and Dad are away on a truck delivery, Mom having gone with Dad on his run to get a small vacation. Lil, the oldest daughter, is left in charge of the house, which includes feeding everyone; she also plans attending an art class in town while her sibling twins are in day camp. The two teenage brothers, Dewey and Vince, are in charge of the part-time family business, the Mariss Bike Barn, a bicycle shop focusing on repairs. Then the *Crunch* happens. Mom and Dad cannot buy enough gas to get home. Lil's art class has been cancelled and business in the bike shop has exponentially exploded.

Every night Mom and Dad talk to their children to discuss emerging problems and solutions. As Dad observes about the shortage, "...it is making people a little crazy....Anything valuable is subject to theft....And values are changing out there"(p 98). But it is the children who must cope with these drastically changing values. Their bike shop and what is in it have become much more valuable overnight, and they must make rapidly adjustments in order to protect themselves. What had worked in the past—ignoring the pesky neighbor who took small things—was not going to work anymore. Instead, the stealing increases. Someone takes the twins' bikes, money made in the shop, and even some one-of-a-kind bicycle parts. The children begin to feel threatened and frustrated by the sudden pickup in business and feel overwhelmed with the discovery of each new theft. Taking care of two five year-olds, running the business, keeping everyone calm, and trying to find the culprit all begin to wear thin on the three Mariss teens. Can they hold out until Mom and Dad get gas to come home? What are they to do in the meantime? And who is stealing from them?

The other book, *Saving Christmas*